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Briefing Notes for DD/OER

1. As all of you are aware who have been involved with the problem of the enemy's order of battle and the terribly important problem of his strengths and weaknesses, the history of our collective endeavor abounds with methodological, conceptual, and philosophical problems and differences. Although at this conference, we will be addressing ourselves to these problems as we see them currently, they do nonetheless extend back over a considerable period of time. Until early last summer when we began to work with early drafts of NIE 14.3, we had largely deferred to the MACV on matters of enemy manpower estimates even though from time to time we had raised questions concerning them. As Mr. Smith has indicated, for the past year we have felt that the concepts and methodologies used in the construction of the enemy order of battle have led to a consistent understatement of current enemy strength and hence, his future capabilities. It would appear, for example, that with the heavy attrition to the enemy's forces during the past few months and particularly the Tet period, had we still been running with the MACV Order of Battle as proposed last summer, we would be in serious difficulties. That is, the Administrative Service component would have been down to little more than 20,000 and the guerrillas, whose strength was then proposed at 65,000, would now be reduced to about 27,000 (84,000, the 31 October 1967 OB minus 46,000, the present OB equals 38,000 reduction; 38,000 from 65,000 equals 27,000). We

believe, that principally because the strengths carried after the Saigon conference were too low -- but also because of the methods used in estimating manpower gains and losses and their net effect -- that the present size of the military order of battle overall is seriously understated.

2. Some of our problem in utilizing the Saigon-generated order of battle results from an information lag, but this primarily concerns the Main and Local Force portion of the OB. For the other elements and our other problems with the Main and Local Force OB, our difficulties are more fundamental and serious. In the case of the Main and Local Force Order of Battle, we believe that the tabulating methodologies which require "hard evidence" reflecting multiple confirmation before units are accepted into the order of battle, results in an underestimate. We realize that these methods insure careful analysis at the working level, but they do not produce best estimates of an actual state of affairs and inevitably lag behind current reality. In short, the sum of strengths carried for each fully accepted organization in the Main and Local Force OB, particularly during a period when the overall size and force structure is expanding necessarily is less than a true estimate. As for the other elements in the order of battle, we feel quite certain that methodologies based on documentary evidence which include reasonable extrapolations in order to estimate forces unobserved, but nonetheless, forces which are needed to fill out a logical force structure yield estimates significantly larger than those provided in the present order of battle.

3. In addition, we have felt that a meaningful estimate of enemy capabilities must include an assessment of the thousands in organized units that

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comprise the entire insurgency base that actively supports regular and irregular combat troops, provides manpower inputs into these units, sustains casualties from Allied attacks and, in turn, inflicts casualties on Allied forces. These feelings were reinforced and, we believe, vindicated by the Tet offensive during which they were mobilized by the enemy to play a significant role in providing essential support to the regular forces.

4. We feel that raising our estimates of the Order of Battle to what we believe is a more meaningful level will allow intelligence officers to grapple more effectively with the realities of the war. We note, for example, that there has been a frequent tendency in the intelligence community to downgrade the number of Communist casualties. Regardless of the accuracy of the KIA, we feel that certain types of attrition -- such as losses from wounds, accidents, sickness, and desertion -- have been substantially underestimated. A raising of the OB would allow us <sup>to</sup> take more of this kind of attrition into account.

5. A larger OB is consistent with the extraordinary ability of the Communists to mobilize manpower and the extent to which they have access to the population. If for example, we were to say that the Communists "control" 3 million people, and have access to perhaps two million more (both gross estimates), we think that allowing for an "insurgency base" of 500-600,000 ~~and~~ people is ~~is~~ not at all unrealistic. We feel <sup>this</sup> ~~our~~ point is reinforced by the fact that <sup>more than</sup> 100,000 of our "insurgency base" are northerners (not drawn from the Communist manpower pool in the South) and that over 200,000 of the remaining southerners -- including militia, hamlet guerrillas, and hamlet infrastructure -- seldom leave their home areas. We would note

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in passing that during World War II Germany and the US were able to mobilize 13% and 9% of their populations respectively full-time into their armed forces.

6. Before we conclude this mornings session, I should like to present briefly our estimates for 31 January and 29 February. I wish to emphasize that these figures should be considered preliminary. We do not wish to claim a great deal of precision for them, particularly for some of their component parts and we present them as orders of magnitude and sollicit your constructive criticisms and suggestions concerning them. At the moment, however, we feel confident that they are reasonable estimates, that they are supported by the evidence, and that they are eminently suitable for use in national intelligence estimates of enemy capabilities. Finally, we believe that it is against such a concept of the manpower base that an estimate of the attrition of enemy forces, whatever this attrition may be, should be measured.

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Some comments on the tables in the handout.

Our breakdown for the Main and Local Forces between the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong is according to the concept of soldiers and not units. For both 31 January and 29 February we assumed that there were 15,000 NVA soldiers in VC units. These soldiers are included in our NVA total. We had noted that the OB had carried 10,000-12,000 as an estimate of such soldiers since early last fall and we assumed that the trend had continued. Our estimate of NVA soldiers for 29 February assumes that all battle losses have been made up through filler infiltration and that there has been an estimated increase of about 10,000 in new units. We have tentatively identified units with a total strength of about 5,000 and assume that there must be additional as yet unidentified units as a result of what we know about the heavy infiltration activity. This latter estimate obviously must be handled with caution and it may be, as the evidence firms up, that additional men came in earlier. As to the VC total, we have simply removed from our estimate 10,000-15,000 for estimated casualties. We have not added to these forces in February or retroactively for January to account for upgrading of guerrillas or to account for new units formed. Undoubtedly, much of the manpower for these new units comes from guerrilla upgrading. We think that this number, therefore, is probably somewhat light.

We view the 29 February adjustment of our guerrilla estimate as rather crude. The status of the guerrillas who participated in the attacks on the cities and towns during Tet seems uncertain. We assume that casualties had been about 10,000 and have made some real inroad into the total force strength.

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Recruiting into the guerrilla ranks, however, has undoubtedly replaced many of the casualties and upgraded personnel. Thus, in addition to reducing our range by 10,000, we have lowered the bottom end by an additional 10,000.

We have made no adjustments in our estimates for any of the other elements of the manpower structure. While these latter elements have undoubtedly suffered casualties and received new recruits, we feel that any net change in their numbers are apt to be lost in the rough orders of magnitude we indicate.

The differences in our holdings on the dates and the MACV OB data will be explained in our briefings.

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COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM  
31 January 1968

	<u>MACV Original</u>	<u>MACV 31 March Update</u>	<u>CIA Estimate</u>
VC/NVA Main and Local Force	115,016	138,900	160,000
Viet Cong	59,397*	61,300*	60,000
NVA	55,619	77,600	100,000**
Guerrillas	72,605	60,409	110,000-120,000
Administrative Services	37,725	37,700	75,000-100,000
Sub-Total	<u>225,346</u>	<u>237,009</u>	<u>345,000-380,000</u>
Self Defense Militia	--	--	100,000
Assault Youth	--	--	10,000- 20,000
Political Infrastructure	84,000	84,000	100,000-120,000
Total	<u>309,346</u>	<u>321,009</u>	<u>555,000-620,000</u>

\*Includes 10,000-12,000 NVA soldiers in VC units as replacements or fillers.  
\*\*Includes 15,000 NVA soldiers in VC units as replacements or fillers.

COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM  
29 February 1968

	<u>MACV Original</u>	<u>MACV 31 March Update</u>	<u>CIA Estimate</u>
VC/NVA Main and Local Forces	122,931	123,000	155,000-160,000
Viet Cong	50,263*	50,600*	45,000- 50,000
NVA	72,668	72,400	110,000**
Guerrillas	47,500	54,499	90,000-110,000
Administrative Services	33,700	33,600	75,000-100,000
Sub-Total	<u>204,131</u>	<u>211,099</u>	<u>320,000-370,000</u>
Self Defense Militia	--	--	100,000
Assault Youth	--	--	10,000- 20,000
Political Infrastructure	84,000	84,000	100,000-120,000
Total	<u>288,131</u>	<u>295,099</u>	<u>530,000-610,000</u>

\*Includes 10,000-12,000 NVA soldiers in VC units as replacements or fillers.  
\*\*Includes 15,000 NVA soldiers in VC units as replacements or fillers.